



News Release

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Service Designates Critical Habitat for the Jemez Mountain Salamander Under the Endangered Species Act

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) took action today designating approximately 90,716 acres in the Jemez Mountains of northern New Mexico in Los Alamos, Rio Arriba, and Sandoval Counties as critical habitat for the Jemez Mountains salamander. Under the Endangered Species Act (Act), any species that is determined to be an endangered or threatened species requires critical habitat to be designated, to the maximum extent prudent and determinable. This final rule becomes effective on December 20, 2013. The Service listed this salamander as endangered on September 10, 2013.

Habitat loss, degradation, and modification through the interrelated effects from severe wildland fire, historical and current fire management practices, forest composition and structure conversions, and climate change are the primary threats to this species.

There are no unoccupied areas proposed to be designated as critical habitat. Land ownership is primarily federal, with 87,840 acres on federal lands, 73 acres on State lands, and 2,803 acres on private land.

Critical habitat is a term in the ESA that identifies geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and that may require special management considerations or protection. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. Critical habitat designation does not impose restrictions on private lands unless federal funds, permits, or activities are involved.

The Service prepared both an economic and environmental analyses of the designation of critical habitat. The environmental assessment has found that designation of critical habitat for the Jemez Mountains salamander would not have direct impacts on the environment, and designation is not expected to impose land use restrictions or prohibit land use activities. The economic analysis considers impacts to economic activities occurring from 2013 to 2032. The economic costs are expected to be about \$260,000 per year. No changes in economic activity or land or water management are expected to result from critical habitat designation.

The Jemez Mountains salamander is a strictly terrestrial species that does not utilize surface or standing water for any life function. This species of salamander does not possess lungs. Breathing occurs through its highly permeable skin, which must remain moist at all times to prevent desiccation and death. The salamander lives underground for most of the year, and emerges above ground when seasonal rains occur, generally July through September, but emergence is based on microhabitat temperature and moisture. Salamanders forage, mate, and shelter while above ground.

Underground habitat supports sheltering for the salamander when not aboveground, and it is believed that the species lays its eggs underground. Underground habitat is in forest or meadow areas containing spaces provided by rocks with fractures or loose rocky soils; rotted tree root channels; or burrows of rodents or large invertebrates.

The health of threatened and endangered species is strongly linked to our own well-being. Millions of Americans depend on habitat that sustains these species – for clean air and water, recreational opportunities and for their livelihoods. By taking action to protect imperiled wildlife, we can ensure a healthy future for our community.

This final rule is available on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/NewMexico/index.cfm>, and <http://www.regulations.gov> at Docket No. FWS–R2–ES–2013–0005. Comments and materials received, as well as supporting documentation used in preparing this final rule, are available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office, 2105 Osuna NE, Albuquerque, NM 87113; by telephone 505–346–2525.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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